

this spatial dimension had been added to Hitler's outlook well before he came into contact in 1924 with geopolitical theories as propounded, for example, by Professor Karl Haushofer. The latter's theses did not form the foundation of Hitler's imperialist ambitions because they were too restricted in scope for the Führer's liking, were not specifically directed against Russia and, in any case, came too late to influence Hitler's decision. In contrast to Haushofer's lack of influence, however, Stoakes underlines, within the limits of a general enquiry into the extent of ideological motivation behind the Führer's opinions, the important bearing of Alfred Rosenberg. He suggests that Rosenberg's conspiratorial view of history, which was moulded on the basis of a virulent anti-semitism and anti-Bolshevism, provided Hitler with attractive ideological justification for his estimate of both Russia and Britain. These views were not made public until the appearance of *Mein Kampf*, Stoakes explains, because of Hitler's fears that important supporters outside the NSDAP (for example, Russian émigrés) might be alienated by his Russian policy, and also because of his fears that opinion within the Party might be offended by his proposed alliance strategy towards Britain.

On a wider scale, Stoakes' paper re-emphasises the crucial significance of the very early 1920s for the development of the NSDAP. Although the Party suffered severely from the abortive Munich *Putsch*, it carried forward into the new phase after 1925 much of the ideology, organisational and propagandistic precepts, and of course, fanatical commitment to the Führer, which had been embedded in the National Socialist ethos during those turbulent incubation years. The NSDAP undeniably underwent profound changes after it was re-founded, particularly as regards the question of how to achieve power in the state, but the spadework completed before 1923 was indispensable to the Party's later success.

Stoakes' discussion of Alfred Rosenberg in his essay furnishes an appropriate connection with the following contributions by Albrecht Tyrell and Peter Stachura. Both authors consider the role and relative importance of subsidiary leaders in the NSDAP. Their choice of Gottfried Feder and Gregor Strasser respectively is apt if only because of the fact that of all Hitler's top leaders they are among the very few who have not yet been the subject of full-scale biographies. While studies of Hitler continue to swamp the academic and popular market, other figures like Josef Goebbels, Hermann Göring and Heinrich Himmler have succeeded in attracting a degree of interest which is in disproportion to their real significance in the NSDAP during the

THE SHAPING OF THE NAZI STATE

EDITED BY PETER D. STACHURA



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CONTENTS

Introduction <i>Peter D. Stachura</i>	9
1. The Evolution of Hitler's Ideas on Foreign Policy, 1919-1925 <i>Geoffrey Stoakes</i>	22
2. Gottfried Feder and the NSDAP <i>Albrecht Tyrell</i>	48
3. 'Der Fall Strasser': Gregor Strasser, Hitler and National Socialism 1930-1932 <i>Peter D. Stachura</i>	88
4. The Occupational Background of the SA's Rank and File Membership during the Depression Years, 1929 to mid-1934 <i>Conan J. Fischer</i>	131
5. The Rise of the National Socialist Students' Association and the Failure of Political Education in the Third Reich <i>Geoffrey J. Giles</i>	160
6. The Nazi Organisation of Women 1933-39 <i>Jill Stephenson</i>	186
7. The Oldenburg Crucifix Struggle of November 1936: A Case Study of Opposition in the Third Reich <i>Jeremy Noakes</i>	210
8. Bureaucracy, Politics and the National Socialist State <i>Jane Caplan</i>	234
9. The German Film Industry and the New Order <i>Marcus S. Phillips</i>	257
Glossary and Abbreviations	282
Contributors	294
Index	298

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For Marie, George and Michael



INTRODUCTION

Peter D. Stachura

National Socialism, as a historical phenomenon, continues to exert a special kind of fascination among wide sections of the general public as well as professional historians. Books, monographs, and learned papers on the subject have accumulated to the point where even the specialist is increasingly hard pushed to keep abreast of all the latest developments and lines of enquiry. This compelling interest exists despite the fact that National Socialism arose more than half a century ago, and collapsed amidst the most ignominious circumstances imaginable in 1945.

There are many good reasons, however, why this topic still attracts such far-ranging attention. It is not just that National Socialism, and particularly its *Führer*, Adolf Hitler, remain essentially enigmatic and elusive of comprehensively satisfying and precise definition. The era itself in which all this took place was so utterly extraordinary and grotesque by any measurement. The circus-like atmosphere of the Third Reich, the absurd antics of its leadership, the awesome sight of disciplined marching columns, the frenzied mass rallies, all seem to promote an aura of the unbelievable about the years 1933 to 1945. Yet the prosaic and gargantuan evil of the Hitlerian epoch, epitomised by the physical annihilation of millions of people, especially of Jews and Eastern Europeans, will remain its indelible hallmark. Names like Auschwitz, Buchenwald, Bergen-Belsen, and Dachau will be forever synonymous with National Socialism. They bear lucid testimony to its devastatingly destructive impact on the whole physical and ethical fabric of European culture and civilisation. There are too many people, uprooted and displaced as a direct result of the Second World War—Hitler's War—who, having experienced the nightmare of National Socialism at first hand, can never allow discussion and judgement of it to rest. For them, above all, National Socialism can never be forgotten, or forgiven.

Moreover, while all the answers to the critical problems of why Germany should have been the first highly industrialised and advanced country to witness the advent to power of an avowedly totalitarian party, and why such a richly cultural nation could have succumbed to nihilistic barbarism in the form of Hitler's dictatorship, have not been

supplied, searching examination of National Socialism must go on. Otherwise, the course of not only German but also European and world history in the twentieth century cannot be understood as deeply or as sensitively as it should be.

From a narrowly academic point of view, it must be borne in mind that a good deal of the literature on National Socialism which appeared in the decade or so after Germany's defeat, especially where it related to the era of the Third Reich, was inevitably and understandably influenced by the direct personal involvement of many authors in that calamitous period. Survivors of the Weimar political system, the concentration camps, and opponents from Germany and other countries certainly wrote much that was in detail useful and relevant. They unequivocally established and documented the cruelty and inhumanity of the National Socialists, but they naturally lacked that necessary detachment for their accounts and impressions to be regarded as entirely objective and sober appraisals. In consequence, it is only comparatively recently that dispassionate, scholarly perspectives have been brought to bear which allow National Socialism to be analysed within conventional criteria of historical enquiry.

Thus, notwithstanding the plethora of literature, there is considerable scope for new interpretations and reassessment of many basic questions, and for more probing scrutiny of still relatively unexplored aspects of National Socialism. While it would be quite inappropriate to suggest that the Nazi era as a whole requires thorough revisionist assessment, it is already the case that some areas, such as the relationship between the internal political dynamics of the Third Reich and its social and economic organisation, and the broad field of foreign policy development, have been the subject of much fresh re-evaluation in recent historiography. Further aspects which need more systematic consideration include the sociological typology of the National Socialist movement, and the nature and magnitude of links between the Nazi Party and big business. *The Shaping of the Nazi State* is designed as a contribution to these new avenues of approach to the study of National Socialism.

The nine essays, which are original and specially written for this volume, collectively present critical and often provocative analyses of a variety of significant themes pertaining to the evolution of National Socialism. Although a number of different methodologies and interpretative frameworks of reference are employed by the authors, every contribution is concerned with penetrating the innermost core of Hitler's movement and offers above all a serious and reasoned

challenge to many traditional orthodoxies and assumptions. Based on an extensive and diversified array of predominantly German archival material, the essays produce a host of controversial arguments and conclusions. While it is not claimed that these ideas constitute a new and identifiable school of thought, they will, it is hoped, advance our knowledge of National Socialism and stimulate further discussion and research. In particular, the present volume is designed to convey the range and quality of the most up-to-date scholarship of a younger generation of historians in the field. The essays, which have been arranged with an eye to chronological order and thematic continuity, are primarily intended for a specialist audience but have been written in such a way as will also appeal, I believe, to non-specialists with a genuine interest in one of the most momentous periods in modern German and European history.

The development of National Socialist attitudes to foreign policy has aroused sustained scholarly comment in recent years, especially in the works of the West German historians Andreas Hillgruber, Klaus Hildebrand, and Jost Dülffer. It has been established beyond reasonable doubt that Hitler's ideas in this sphere are to be regarded as constituents of a coherent, if fundamentally irrational, programme. Andreas Hillgruber originally advocated the concept of a *Stufenplan* in Hitler's calculations, whereby German political and territorial power would expand in stages to the point where the Third Reich not only achieved hegemony in Europe and *Lebensraum* in the East, but also ultimately became poised for overseas global aggrandisement. Accepting this scenario, Geoffrey Stoakes, in the first essay in this volume, nonetheless takes issue with established interpretations of a central theme of Hitler's foreign policy, his attitude towards Russia and Britain.

Until now, it has been accepted that Hitler only conceived of creating a vast empire in Eastern Europe at Russia's expense in 1924, and that this was essentially the result of his espousal of the idea of an alliance with Britain two years earlier. Disagreeing with this view, Stoakes argues that for a combination of ideological, strategic, political, and personal reasons, Hitler had decided by late 1922 on a policy of hostility towards Russia, and a policy favouring alliance with Britain. This is despite the fact that these attitudes were expressed only privately by Hitler to Party colleagues and not made public until the writing and subsequent publication of *Mein Kampf* in 1924-6. Hitler was convinced, Stoakes continues, that Britain's support was vitally necessary if Germany was to be able to realise her territorial ambitions in the East. Indeed, extending this hypothesis, Stoakes states, against current opinion, that